

ASOR Newsletter 6/1/53

AMERICAN SCHOOLS OF ORIENTAL RESEARCH

JERUSALEM AND BAGHDAD

ARCHAEOLOGICAL NEWSLETTER

Confidential

Not for publication

Newsletter #10

1952/1953
1953-54

Jerusalem, June 1, 1953.

Another school year is rapidly drawing to a close. Our archaeological work in the field is completed and all that remains to be done is to prepare the materials for the inspection of Mr. Harding, the head of the Department of Antiquities and await his division of the "spoils". Then comes the great job of packing what is assigned to the ASOR for transportation home for further study in preparation for publication. The last members of our student group of 1952-53 will be disappearing within the next few days, and with their departure, there will be a feeling of emptiness in the school. There will be other arrivals and departures throughout the summer, but our summer guests rarely stay long and they do not give the effect of stability and continuance which the regular student group gives.

A last-minute trip to Petra left this morning in charge of Mr. Richardson. Mr. Andrews, on his return from Petra, leaves immediately for Syria and so home. Father North departs in a few days for Egypt. The Fishers left last month in order to spend some time studying in Europe before returning to the U.S. My parents and sister have departed for England to spend some time there on the way home. Mr. Andry's wife and two children arrived to stay with us for a week or so before starting their drive back to Europe -- and finally home -- through Turkey. Mr. Warren will accompany them. The Wolfes are still with us, but they are planning to leave the middle of next week. So very soon the school will be a very quiet place, ready to receive Dr. and Mrs. Frank Cross, the first of those who will go to make up the 1953-54 team. Dr. Cross will be in charge beginning July 1

Again Dhiban looms large in the account of the School's activities during the past month. We completed what I think was a very successful six weeks' campaign. The usual thing happened. It is proverbial that important finds always turn up in the last days of the dig. It was so at Jericho with the now famous Neolithic plastered skulls. Our discovery at Dhiban was not so spectacular but was still important enough to keep us at work two days longer than we had planned. Our find was a church. It was at first not recognized as such for all standing walls and architectural details had vanished. We were approaching it from the atrium and had two thresholds but that was all. I must thank Père de Vaux and Robert Hamilton for the suggestion that we might be dealing with a church. Further work traced the south stylobate -- the foundation for the row of columns separating the central nave from the south aisle. We therefore carried our work further to the north to establish the line of the north stylobate and the threshold of the north aisle. The extra time was required to establish the east end of the church. In this respect we were only partially successful. We did discover the chancel, the remains of the sockets for holding the chancel screen and holes cut in the pavement which probably establish the position of the altar, but the back wall of the chancel -- the apse wall proper -- could not be traced. It seems to have been completely robbed out and/or tumbled down the side of the tell. Still, enough is extant to provide us with the information for reconstruction. The church is probably to be dated to the very end of the Byzantine period. Incidentally, the

discovery of a church here may throw some light on a mysterious room which we excavated partially last autumn, but only completed this spring. It was plastered all round, apparently had been covered with a roof supported on two stone walls, and had a floor of cobbles. The plastered chamber could not have been more than a meter deep, not counting the space between the top edge of the plaster and the vaulting. It was therefore too shallow for cistern and was wide open, that is, it did not have a narrow opening at the top. We called it provisionally a bath. Now its position, directly to the north of the east end of the church, and communicating with the church by another room which was probably a sacristy, leads me to believe that it was connected with the baptistry. While on this topic, I should mention another discovery, made independently of the work on the church, but which can probably only be considered a baptismal font. It is a cross-shaped receptacle, built of stone, and plastered inside. Its walls rise to the floor level of the chamber in which it was found. This "font" was discovered by Mr. Richardson while trying to clear up some of the problems of the city wall complex on the south side. The plan of the building with which this receptacle is connected is by no means clear, and again we may have to reckon here with the possibility that the major part of the building has been robbed out or tumbled down the south slope.

Work on the south-east building continued. While we were able to establish the plan of the Nabataean building, a good deal more work is required before we can consider it finished. It now appears to have undergone at least one rebuilding, but the plan of both periods seems to have been the same. Unfortunately, although the later filling of this building to provide a platform for the Roman building preserved the plan of the earlier building, it seems to have destroyed all floor levels. The Roman building itself was apparently used as a source of materials for the church and has preserved little of its superstructure. Only its outside walls and one cross wall remain. The large paved area surrounding it was utilized in some places for the floor of the church, in other places robbed out for building elsewhere. The whole picture is complicated by this continual re-use of walls and materials. A good example of this is the south wall of the church. This was nothing more than the north wall of the earlier Nabataean building extended to east and west over the Roman wall. It will take a great deal of study both of the architectural remains and the pottery before any exact plans can be drawn of the several structures and dates assigned to them.

One point of interest for future excavators at Dhiban may be the fill used within the walls of the Nabataean structure. Some strata within this fill contained masses of pottery -- 95% Iron Age, and mostly with affinities for Iron I rather than Iron II. It parallels quite closely the materials from the Iron Age tombs. In other words our Iron Age pottery at Dhiban seems to be mostly from the period of King Mesha himself. In case archaeologists amongst you may wonder what made up the other 5% of the pottery from the fill, I should say that it was Nabataean and early Roman down to the early second century A.D. While this fact is most important for dating, it is the question of the source of the masses of Iron Age pottery which intrigues me. Good, thick Iron Age strata must exist somewhere on the tell and we are probably to look for them at the northern end, that is, north of the area where we have been digging for the last three years.

During the last few weeks of the dig, Mr. Richardson was in charge of a party which attempted to clear up some of the problems of the wall system. I can only report that the problem becomes more and more complicated. Certain points have definitely been cleared up, but other problems have arisen. The main difficulty in solving these problems is the presence of many lines of stone walls, often built of huge blocks, one resting against the other and with little or no stratification to assist one in dating them. It is possible to date them relatively to some extent, but even this is not always possible when we cannot penetrate to their foundations or cut

through them. Father North's sounding finally reached the base of the great battered wall on the east side, which was first discovered in 1950 and followed down part way. We know now that the wall rests on the rock and stretches up to its present preserved height a distance of 10 meters. As it rests on the rock there is no underlying stratification in which it is cut and no foundation trench. It is therefore impossible to date its building from this sounding. But it is possible to say that late Byzantine pottery (and perhaps even Arab) was found in the strata running up to it, a sure indication that it was definitely in use at least as late as Byzantine times. The date of its construction must be arrived at in a more indirect way. There is a little evidence which may be used, but it has still to be evaluated.

No further new tombs were discovered. The clearance of the five Moabite tombs was completed at the same time as a thorough search was being carried out for other Moabite and Nabataean tombs. The paucity of tombs at Dhiban, and the robbed and ransacked condition of those discovered, leads one to the conclusion that it was the quarrying activities, and particularly the terracing efforts of Nabataeans, Romans and Byzantines which have removed so much of this evidence. The five tombs we did discover are an excellent case in point. One had been swept clean in the Byzantine period and contained only a few Byzantine sherds and two late Byzantine lamps. Another had been cleared but had been re-used for burials near the entrance. No pottery of any kind was associated with these burials and they may be as late as Arab times. The other three tombs contained late burials and intrusive pottery, but had not been completely cleared by these intruders. But what was left, both of terra cotta coffins and pottery, was smashed to smithereens. The task of reconstructing whole vessels from the thousands of tiny pieces is a time consuming one. All that can be said of the coffins is that they seem to have resembled the coffin found in the Moabite tomb a year ago, but there is no trace of a moulded face on any of our three examples. Outside one of the tombs, a large bone pit was found, filled with charred bones and Moabite sherds. Evidently the intruders threw the materials out of the tombs and set fire to it. They seem to have been most interested in the bones and perhaps they intended to use the burned bone for fertilizer on their fields. Yet the hope always continues that there are undisturbed tombs at Dhiban and a future expedition may find them.

This brief and tentative report on our spring campaign at Dhiban should be completed with a report of our distinguished visitors. Fathers Sylvester Saller and Bellarmino Bagatti, whose publications of the excavations at Mt. Nebo have been of particular use to me, brought a party of Franciscans to visit us. They puzzled over our late Greek inscription and made several good suggestions as to interpretation. Père de Vaux brought a party of Dominicans, Robert Hamilton (the ex-Director of the Palestine Department of Antiquities) and my wife for a visit another day. Mr. Harding, the head of the Jordan Department of Antiquities, paid us two visits and seemed quite pleased with the results of our work. Professor William Morton of the Louisville Baptist Theological Seminary, who was a Fellow at the School in 1950-51 and as such participated in the first season's work at Dhiban, visited us with a party on his way to Petra. He was interested in the great changes in the outlines of the tell and in the work done in the last two seasons. I am hoping that before he leaves Jordan I shall have some time to discuss with him some of the pottery evidence from that first season for it has a great bearing on our conclusions based on this year's evidence. We had many non-archaeological visitors as well, the most distinguished of whom was Mr. Caffrey, the U.S. Ambassador to Egypt. We had thought that we might even have the opportunity of meeting Mr. Dulles and Mr. Stassen for we had sent a note to Mr. Green, the U.S. Ambassador in Jordan, inviting him and his guests to view the work of the American School. Unfortunately Mr. Green was forced to send his regrets, for the itinerary of his guests was so tightly organized that they could not take the time to drive down. Mrs. Wolfe, my parents and sister paid us a visit one day



just to see what we were doing that was so important as to keep us away from Jerusalem so much of the time. In addition to our regular staff at Dhiban we had several participants who were there for shorter periods. Mr. Keith Andrews was with us for two weeks, Prof. DeBoer of Leyden and Mr. Robert Andry were with us for a week each.

There is very little other archaeological news from Jordan at present. The Belgian expedition has completed its work of exploration for new caves and has returned home. They met with some success. There are still manuscripts and rumours of manuscripts, all of which have to be investigated. Only an hour ago I had a visitor to report that he had been approached by a Beduin who wished to sell "about 700 squares centimeters of manuscript in Aramaic on dark brown leather". I took the visitor for a conference with Père de Vaux and we have begun negotiations to see the manuscripts in question. But money for the purchase of these materials is short again and it is possible that another appeal for funds will have to be made. In the meantime, plans for publication are moving quickly and it is hoped that the Oxford University Press will undertake to publish all materials discovered over the last few years in several volumes. The Wheaton expedition to Dothan under Dr. Free has just finished its first season with very interesting results. I am sure that they are encouraged to carry on with the work next year and for some years to come. The Dominican expedition to Qumran is over for this season. The archaeological survey of the Jordan and Yarmuk river valleys is completed with most interesting results especially for the Chalcolithic period. Work on at least one of the new sites discovered is to be undertaken in the autumn. Miss Kirkbride, who was our tomb expert at Jericho and Dhiban, leaves on Wednesday for Jerash where she is to direct a six-months' season of excavation and reconstruction (mainly the south theatre). Herr Gaur has finished his work on the mosaics at Khirbet el-Mefjer and Mr. Hamilton hopes that the definitive publication on the site may be ready by the end of the year. Mr. Auni Dajani, inspector of Antiquities in west Jordan, has been busy investigating and excavating tombs accidentally discovered in various places. One of the famous Neolithic skulls is on display at present in the Palestine Archaeological Museum here in Jerusalem and is arousing keen interest.

Those of you who have visited the School will probably remember "Sewing Mary", more properly Mary Deebe, whose sure fingers have made curtains, sheets, bed-spreads etc for the School and countless dresses and shirts for School personnel. I am sorry to report that she died very suddenly a few weeks ago as a result of a bad heart. She will be much missed by us all.

Again, we all send you greetings from Jerusalem.

A.D. Tushingham, Director.